

HOW TO REPAIR WOOD FINISHES

revised by THOMAS DONKIN

Whether antique or modern, furniture that is used every day is bound to acquire some marks. Finishes that are dulled or have white spots, cigarette burns, scratches, or checked varnish can be improved by using readily available materials.

The following procedures will not accomplish miracles, but are intended as treatment for one or two blemishes on what is otherwise a good finish. They will not take the place of refinishing.

CLEANING

Smoke, steam, house dust, fingerprints, and wax all tend to soil furniture. Often, a thorough cleaning is all that is needed to revive the luster and depth of an oil, sealer, varnish, or lacquer finish.

Shellac finishes are sensitive to water, alcohol, and heat, and may be permanently damaged by cleaning mixtures. To test for a shellac finish, apply a small quantity of alcohol to an inconspicuous place on the furniture (usually on the inside of a leg near the top). If the finish becomes sticky or gummy, or is dissolved, do not use the cleaning solution below.

On finishes other than shellac, good results are obtained by cleaning the surface with the Cleaning Mixture given at right.

Keep the mixture warm in a double boiler. Rub the finish with a soft cloth dampened in the mixture; then wipe it dry, and polish it with a dry cloth.

Dullness is difficult to remove from varnish or enamel of poor quality. To increase the luster, apply a thin coat of paste wax and buff well; or use the Light-Mixture Polish given at right.

Rub the polish well into the surface and buff briskly with a clean dry cloth until the finish is dry and shiny.

CLEANING MIXTURE

- 1 quart warm water
- 3 tablespoons boiled linseed oil
- 1 tablespoon turpentine

LIGHT-MIXTURE POLISH

- 2 parts boiled linseed oil
- 1 part turpentine

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SHELLAC FINISHES

Moisture causes white spots on shellac. Let the finish dry thoroughly; the spot may disappear. If it remains, remove any wax with a cloth dampened with turpentine or a nonflammable dry-cleaning fluid; then re-wax. Or, remove the wax, rub down the white spot with pumice and oil (see below), and re-wax it.

WHITE SPOTS

White spots on natural finishes are caused by heat, moisture, or alcohol. In most cases you can remove them by rubbing the finish with a thin paste of powdered pumice stone (FFF) and light mineral or machine oil.

Rub the mixture over the spot, using your fingertips or a piece of felt. Wipe the surface clean with dry rags. To remove any oil that remains, wash the surface with a rag moistened with detergent suds. If the pumice leaves a dull spot, polish it with rottenstone and oil.

Commercial preparations for removing white spots may damage some finishes. It is wise to test these preparations on an inconspicuous part.

SCRATCHES

The cleaning solution often makes scratches less noticeable. To treat scratches of a more serious nature, use one of the following:

Rub the scratch with commercial scratch remover. (Test the reaction of these scratch removers first.)

OR

Rub a small amount of oil color (see "Color Matching," page 4) into the scratch to color it. Allow it to dry; and cover it with quick drying varnish applied with a toothpick or fine brush.

OR

Mix oil color with the varnish, apply, and smooth as above. More than one application may be necessary.

HAIRLINE CHECKING IN VARNISH

HEAVY-MIXTURE POLISH

- 2 parts boiled linseed oil
- 1 part turpentine
- 1 ½ parts clear varnish

Checking is caused by changes in the moisture content of the wood which cause the wood to expand and contract, cracking the varnish finish. Sunlight, hot radiators, and extreme changes in humidity can be contributing factors.

To prevent this condition from going any farther, and to improve the appearance of the finish, first wash the finish with the recipe suggested on page 1. When it is thoroughly dry, rub the surface with the Heavy-Mixture Polish given at left.

SMALL HOLES, GOUGES, AND CRACKS

A more extensive filling job is necessary for blemishes that have penetrated the finish and damaged the wood. These depressions can be filled in one of the following ways:

Mix a small quantity of dry spackling compound with water to make a stiff paste. Add oil color until the paste is a workable consistency. To match the finish, choose a color darker than the finish because the paste will lighten as it dries. Apply this "Swedish putty" to the hole, using a palette knife, putty knife, or spatula. Do not worry about using too much because you can smooth it down easily. When it is dry, after about one hour, smooth the patch with fine steel wool or very fine abrasive paper. The hole should be full and the surrounding area clean. Varnish the patch. Adjust the color, if necessary, with colored varnish and let it dry.

OR

Melt stick shellac with a heated kitchen knife, screw driver, or soldering iron. Drop the melted shellac into the hole and press firmly with a moistened finger. The patch should stand above the surface. When it is hard, shave it down with a single-edged razor blade until it is level. Rub gently with very fine steel wool, or pumice and oil, to smooth the patch and the surrounding surface; apply wax or polish.

CIGARETTE BURNS

Remove the blackened finish and charred wood with fine steel wool wrapped around a matchstick. Rub only on the burned area to avoid scratching the good finish.

If the burn seems to have damaged only the finish, the spot may be repaired by using the method given for scratches (page 2).

Burns that have damaged the wood need more filling such as is outlined in the preceding section.

Warm this mixture before you use it. Apply it to a small part of the furniture at a time, and rub it hard, using the palm of your bare hand. When the polish begins to stiffen under your hand, wipe off the polish that remains, using several clean cloths; if you do not take off all this extra polish, the furniture will remain sticky. Repeat the treatment as necessary.

This mixture is effective in repolishing very dull finishes and building up worn or damaged places in the finish.

The Heavy-Mixture Polish is a treatment rather than a cure. It will seal the surface but will not restore a deteriorated finish. Repeat treatment annually for best results.

COLOR MATCHING

OIL COLORS USED

REDS: Turkey red, rose madder, or rose pink. Burnt sienna.

YELLOWs: Raw sienna, French ocher.

BROWNS: Burnt umber, Vandyke brown, raw umber.

BLACKS: Lampblack, ivory black.

WOOD COLORS TO BE MATCHED

WALNUT: Use either burnt umber or Vandyke brown; both are rich, dark, warm browns. Raw umber, a yellowish brown, is sometimes added.

MISSION OAK: Use raw umber.

BROWN OAK: Use burnt umber, or burnt umber and a little raw sienna.

GOLDEN OAK: Use raw sienna and a little burnt umber.

MAPLE: Use burnt sienna for the redder maples; raw sienna for yellow maples. Or, mix both burnt and raw sienna for blends.

RED MAHOGANY: Use turkey red, rose madder, or rose pink; add a little burnt umber or black, if needed.

BROWN MAHOGANY: Use burnt umber, adding a very little red, if needed.

DARK MAHOGANY: Use one of the mahogany reds with black added.

CHERRY: Use burnt sienna. Add a little burnt umber and one of the mahogany reds, if needed.

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